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DEFENSIVE OPERATION OF THE 3RD BATTALION, 157TH INFANTRY  
(45TH INFANTRY DIVISION) ALONG THE MOLETTA RIVER LINE,  
NORTHWEST OF ANZIO, ITALY, 7 - 8 FEBRUARY 1944  
(ANZIO CAMPAIGN)  
(Personal Experience of a Heavy Weapons Company Commander)

Type of operation described: BATTALION IN A NIGHT DEFENSE  
IN FLAT AND OPEN TERRAIN.

Captain James D. Shi, Jr., Infantry  
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO. I

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph outlines the defensive operation of the 3rd Battalion, 157th Infantry, U. S. 45th Infantry Division in the Battle of the Moletta River Line, Anzio, Italy, 7-8 February 1944, during the initial phase of the Anzio Campaign.

In order that a complete orientation be given to the reader, certain facts and events that influenced the action must be depicted. The reasons for the Anzio landings should be clarified so as to leave no doubt as to the necessity for taking this "calculated risk" involving large numbers of men and great quantities of materiel.

*not shown*  
"During the winter of 1943-44, the Allies in Italy were slowly smashing their way through rugged mountain obstacles on the roads to Rome. Since the Allied invasion of southern Italy, the Germans had fought a delaying action in order to prepare a series of defensive lines farther to the rear. The main defensive barrier guarding the approaches to Rome was the Gustav Line, extending across the Italian peninsula from Minturno to Ortona (see Map A). This defensive line was most formidable; the enemy engineers having reinforced the natural mountain defenses with an elaborate network of pillboxes, bunkers, and mine fields. The Germans had also reorganized their forces to resist the Allied advance, and Hitler was determined to gain the prestige of holding the Allies south of Rome." (1)

(1) R-1, p. 1-2.

"Opposing the Germans was the Allied 15th Army Group, with the U.S. Fifth Army attacking on the western and the British Eighth Army on the eastern sectors of the front. In mid-December, men of the Fifth Army were fighting their way through the forward enemy defenses, which became known as the Winter Line. (See Map A) Braving the mud, rain, and cold of an unusually bad Italian winter, scrambling up precipitous mountain slopes where only mules or human pack-trains could traverse, the Allied forces struggled to penetrate the German defenses." (2)

"By early January 1944, Fifth Army troops had broken through the Winter Line and had occupied the heights above the Garigliano and Rapido Rivers, from which they could look across to Mount Cassino, with Highway No. 6 curving around its base into the Liri Valley. Before them were the main ramparts of the Gustav Line, guarding this natural corridor to Rome. The Gustav Line was an even more formidable barrier than the Winter Line, because of the snow-capped peaks flanking the Liri Valley and the rain - swollen Garigliano and Rapido Rivers. Unless some strategy could be devised to turn the defenses of the Gustav Line, Fifth Army faced another long and arduous campaign of mountain fighting." (3)

"The strategy decided upon by the Allied leaders, was an amphibious landing on the west coast of Italy, behind <sup>the</sup> enemy lines. This plan, which was to be executed by a single division, was abandoned on 20 December 1943, the date set for the proposed landing. Because of the tenacious German opposition and difficult terrain, the Eighth and Fifth Armies in the

(2) R-1, p. 1-2; (3) R-1, p. 2-3.

Winter Line Campaign could not reach their assigned objectives. This situation, together with the lack of available landing craft, made the plan for an immediate amphibious end-run impracticable." (4)

"The continued slow progress of the Allied advance caused the revival of the plan for an amphibious operation south of Rome along the lines as previously contemplated. Originally planned as a subsidiary operation on the left flank of an advancing Fifth Army, it developed into a major operation far in the enemy rear when the main Fifth Army troops failed to crack the mountain defenses in the south. This landing was intended to cut the German communications and break the flank of the Gustav Line. Furthermore, it was believed that the Germans would move a part of their reserves to halt the new landings, and thereby imperil the Main Line of Resistance in the south. The U.S. VI Corps, selected to make the landing, consisted of British as well as American forces." (5)

*what size?*  
"The assault force shipped out of Naples and was virtually unopposed when it landed on 22 January 1944 in the vicinity of Anzio and Nettuno, Italy. (See Map A) Due to the limited number of landing craft available, a three day turnaround was required to bring in reinforcements. The enemy made every effort to rush troops to this area and, aided by the bad weather which interfered with Allied air attacks on his communications, he was able to move units from the Gustav Line, from the Balkans, and from France. Within the first two weeks, the Germans had dispatched enough reinforcements to the beach-head to match the Allied strength. The Allied Commanders de-

(4) R-1, p. 2-3; (5) R-1, p. 3.

cided to hold their present positions and prepare for the defense of the new beachhead." (6)

#### THE GENERAL SITUATION

In the first week that the U.S. 45th Infantry Division had been on the Anzio Beachhead (this division had landed as reinforcements), the troops had relaxed somewhat, having just left the scene of strenuous and hazardous combat in the snow-clad mountains above Venafro, Italy, just east of Cassino. As the American lines were extended and consolidated on the perimeter of the new beachhead, the men were astounded at the silence, which was only occasionally disrupted by sporadic small arms fire or the crash of an artillery shell. However, this silence was most misleading and actually became ominous. (7)

"This silence gave no warning of the hell that was to be Anzio. The lonely stretch of Italian coast looked gaunt and uninviting to all men. The enemy had prepared few defenses in this sector -- they had not progressed beyond the usual hasty field fortifications, trenches, some barbed-wire road blocks, and a few mine fields. The infantry troops organized and prepared defensive positions about the consolidated beachhead perimeter, for it was established by air reconnaissance that the Germans were rapidly bringing in reserves to oppose any advance in the direction of Rome." (8)

Although the Germans devoted the first days of February 1944 chiefly to defensive measures, it became more and more evident that supplies and reinforcements were being built up for a major counter-offensive. German artillery fire in-

(6) R-2, p. 27; (7) Personal knowledge; (8) R-4, p. 71.

creased in intensity, and enemy patrols probed the forward lines. Higher headquarters realized that the Germans were massing for an attack, but had no idea from which direction it would come. The enemy now had numerical superiority, and from limited vantage points, forward observers could watch German tanks trundling out of the mountains to move into position beyond normal artillery range." (9)

"At the beginning of February 1944, the German Fourteenth Army was preparing to strike. Hitler had personally ordered that the "Abscess" below Rome be removed, whatever the cost. Having stopped the Allied drive toward Cisterna and Campoleone, the Germans renewed their preparations for an all-out offensive against the Anzio beachhead. For the first two weeks of February, while these preparations were under way, the Germans believed that VI Corps might again attack to break out of the beachhead. The German attacks of early February were designed to pave the way for the enemy's main offensive, and, by maintaining constant pressure on VI Corps, prevent the Allies from reorganizing for a new drive out of the beachhead. The following extract, in part, from the Journal of the German Fourteenth Army explains the reason for the attack on the Moletta River Line. "Fourteenth Army has planned attacks with limited objectives, to suit various situations as they arise. <sup>when</sup> Then the enemy is weakened by these attacks, an all-out counteroffensive will be launched." (10)

*single*  
*multiple attacks*

On 5 February 1944, the U. S. 45th Infantry Division less the 157th Infantry reverted to VI Corps reserve and occupied

(9) R-4, p. 71; (10) R-1, p. 43.



breakthrough positions in the center of the beachhead perimeter.

"The 157th Infantry Regiment was defending the west or the coastal sector of the beachhead. (See Map B) The British Second North Staffordshire Regiment was in position on the right of the 157th Infantry, astride the main road leading south into the harbor of Anzio. The hub of enemy activity in the coastal sector was the area surrounding the factory at Aprilia, situated on the southern edge of the town of Carroceto. Virtually a "no man's land", the factory could neither be claimed by the Germans nor the British, who held positions south of it. <sup>map shows line north of factory</sup> The enemy launched a tank attack against the British but the Tommies stopped the assault with artillery fire. However, the Germans continued to press their advantage throughout the night of 5-6 February 1944." (11)

*Needs Map to cover enemy plan in detail*

"The factory area at Aprilia consisted of many buildings which were located on a slight rise of ground, and stood like a fortress dominating the surrounding countryside. The hamlet of Carroceto, located 500 yards southwest of the factory and just north of the overpass which crosses the Albano road and the parallel railway, together with the factory represented important enemy objectives. Capture of the factory and Carroceto were the next logical moves for the enemy as he planned an all-out effort along the axis of the Albano road. With these two objectives in enemy hands, strikes could be made in several different directions into the final beachhead line of defense. A network of roads, with the focal points at the factory and

(11) R-3, p. 53-54.

Carroceto, would permit the enemy a tactical advantage to the south and southeast. The enemy plan of attack called for a simultaneous assault on the night of 7-8 February 1944 by the 65th Infantry Division from the west, and by Combat Group Groeser from the east, converging on the Factory and Carroceto".

(12)

#### THE BATTALION SITUATION

Meanwhile, in the 157th Infantry sector the front remained relatively quiet. During the early hours of darkness on the night of 3-4 February 1944, the 3rd Battalion, 157th Infantry, relieved the 2nd Battalion of the same regiment and was in position to the west or left of the British Second North Staffordshire Battalion. While checking the newly assumed positions, members of the 3rd Battalion discovered that the enemy was only forty to fifty yards across intervening "waddis" or gulches. It was also learned from the relieved battalion that it was practically impossible to capture a German as a source of information, even though they were within calling distance of each other.

Map 'C'  
The 3rd Battalion was responsible for a frontage of approximately 2400 yards with Company L in position on the right and in contact with the adjacent British unit. There was a gap of 200 yards in the center, between Company L and Company I, which protected the left portion of the battalion sector. Company I had one rifle platoon in position to the extreme left, separated from the main company position by a gap of 250 yards. This platoon was reinforced with a section of heavy machine

(12) R-1, p. 55.

guns and a section of 81mm mortars from Company M, and maintained contact with the 2nd Battalion, 157th Infantry, 1000 yards to the left. This gap between the two battalions was heavily wooded and the few men defending it furnished adequate protection against a breakthrough. Company K was in support, in the center, about 300 yards to the rear or south of the gap between Companies L and I. In addition to the heavy weapons with the platoon of Company I, another section of heavy machine guns was in position on the right flank of Company I. The other platoon of heavy machine guns was supporting Company L, with one section on each flank of the rifle company. The remaining 81 mm mortars (two sections) were located to support the entire front-line of the battalion sector. One section of 81mm mortars was in position to the center rear of Company K, <sup>and</sup> whereas the third section was to the right rear of Company K in an abandoned rock quarry. The 3rd Battalion Command Post was established in a ditch to the right of the quarry, ~~and~~ 500 yards in rear of Company L. A good dirt road, running from the rear just inside the right flank of the battalion sector, was utilized as the axis of communication, supply, and evacuation. The battalion aid station was at the junction of this north-south road (supply) and the main east-west macadam highway. (See Map C) (13)

After taking over this position, the 3rd Battalion, 157th Infantry, was ordered to initiate plans for a night raid to be executed on the night of 7-8 February 1944 at 0100 hours. As a preliminary preparation for the raid, the 3rd Battalion was engaged throughout the night of 6-7 February in constructing the

(13) R-3, p. 55; R-5.

How does construction of position terrain for preliminary raid?

strongest fortified position possible under existing conditions and the limitation of time and darkness. Inasmuch as the terrain was flat as a "table-top" with limited vegetation of small scrubs and weeds, it was necessary to confine the major part of the preparations and movement to the hours of darkness. The newly assumed positions were reconnoitered for better alternate and supplementary firing positions, especially for the automatic weapons of the battalion. Fire plans were checked, mine fields and wire entanglements were improved, positions were better consolidated and coordinated, and more adequate communications were established. Additional rations, water, and ammunition were brought onto position as a three-day reserve. Each machine gun, both light and heavy, had 5000 rounds of ammunition available at each gun position, <sup>and</sup> whereas the 81mm mortars had 900 rounds total of H. E. Light, H. E. Heavy, and White Phosphorus ammunition stored at each mortar emplacement. (14)

Final preparations for the raid were completed during the daylight hours of 7 February. Complete and thorough analyses of maps and the terrain were made, the raiding party and its commander were selected and orientated. The commander of the raiding party, the heavy weapons company commander, and the battalion artillery liaison officer made an aerial reconnaissance flight in artillery observation planes (L-5) to become more familiar with their missions as outlined for the raid. As darkness closed in for the night, there was a feeling of confidence and optimism among the men that the raid would fulfill its purpose in gaining information as to the intentions of the

(14) Personal knowledge.

enemy. It was not suspected that the ensuing several hours would prove a dilemma for all. However, it would be ascertained that the preparations made for the raid would be of great benefit in defending this position. (15)

#### THE DEFENSE OF THE MOLETTA RIVER LINE

At 2100 hours, just four hours prior to H-hour for the contemplated raid, the 3rd Battalion positions were subjected to an intense and jolting artillery and mortar barrage. As soon as the barrage subsided somewhat, German infantry with strong tank support suddenly assaulted Company L and the adjacent British on the right. While the main enemy pressure was hurled between Company L and the left flank unit of the British Second North Staffordshire Regiment, Company I fought off a limited diversionary attack. There were several farm buildings 350 yards to the front of Company L, which the enemy employed as an assembly area to discharge waves of infantry into the 3rd Battalion's right flank. Increased activity around the farm buildings disclosed that the Germans had organized for more than just a small-scale attack. Several hundred yards to the right of these buildings, sixteen Mark VI (Tiger) tanks were slowly but unhaltingly rumbling towards the British positions. Three hundred yards to the left of the farm houses an abandoned American tank (M3) was fully utilized as a pill-box. Even though the tank was immobilized, the Germans had organized a strong point of three heavy machine guns, with excellent fields of fire, around and under the stricken vehicle. Soon it was discovered that five German Tiger tanks were roaming about to

(15) Personal knowledge.

the direct front of the gap between Companies I and L. Apparently these armored monsters were leisurely and playfully endeavoring to locate a weak point along the forward line. Company I was alert to this mechanized threat and marshalled the only active anti-tank measures available for defense - bazooka men were in the most advantageous firing positions and the artillery forward observer was firing all available guns at his command. The passive anti-tank measures of mine fields would be partially effective in retarding the few tanks which might break through. <sup>??</sup> <sup>would they? where were they</sup> (16)

When the attack had started, all men were alerted (to battle) because of the tremendous volume of deadly artillery, tank, mortar, automatic weapons, and small arms fire that covered the entire battalion sector. Just as this untimely attack began, the battalion switchboard operator opened all circuits effecting a "party line", which connected the battalion commander, the company commanders, and the mortar and artillery observers. A lateral line had been laid to the British, establishing communication with them. (17)

The Germans' initial preparatory and subsequent covering fires actually destroyed the four heavy machine guns in the sector of Company L and the two heavy machine guns in Company I's right flank within the first thirty minutes of the attack. It was uncanny how the enemy neutralized these automatic weapons as quickly as they did. (18)

In addition to the light machine guns of the rifle companies, there were two extra light machine guns from Company M in

(16) (17) (18) Personal knowledge.

position on the left flank of Company L which the enemy had not known about. Several hours before the enemy attack, the heavy weapons company commander had organized a provisional light machine gun platoon to reinforce the forward positions. At least two men from each heavy machine gun squad were transferred to this provisional platoon to serve as gun crews for the light machine guns. Qualified men were placed as section leaders and the First Sergeant became the platoon leader. One section of this platoon, with the First Sergeant, crawled into position shortly before dark. The other section was to occupy a position in the sector of Company I after dark and reinforce itself with several men from the heavy machine gun section in that area. The provisional light machine gun section in Company L's sector occupied a strategic firing position <sup>where?</sup> and the crews of these two guns accounted for a large number of enemy casualties. Continuous firing of these weapons stopped the enemy penetration into the left flank sector of Company L. As the grey-clad Germans moved forward and endeavored to cut their way through the wire obstacles, these guns, unaccounted for by the enemy, literally mowed the attackers down like faltering stalks of grain swaying to the ground. This sudden and wholly unexpected demonstration of accurate automatic fire power turned aside the oncoming waves of assaulting infantry, thereby requiring the enemy to increase his striking force at the point of contact. <sup>where?</sup>

As the assaulting hordes wavered momentarily, and then pressed their advantage of overwhelming numbers in a slightly new direction of attack, there was the timely and dramatic appearance of two men from Company L on the immediate scene of

action. These two soldiers, one a sergeant and the other a German-speaking private, had cautiously crawled to a vantage point in one of the dry waddis. When the right flank of the enemy was suddenly turned by heavy machine gun fire, the German officers and non-commissioned officers could be heard bellowing commands to maintain unity of organization and to keep contact with adjacent units. It was at this opportune moment that the two American soldiers decided to play havoc with their German counter-parts. The German-speaking Americans subjected the enemy to a mixture of official sounding commands and sworn epithets while the American sergeant demonstrated his prowess as a grenade-thrower. This little side-light provided a touch of comedy to what was meant to be entirely a tragedy. Any enemy soldiers that had strayed or had become lost from his unit was ordered by the American to move in the latter's direction. The "G.I." even lashed out with fluent obscene German retorts to entice the enemy within grenade range of the two men from Company L. Additional grenades were supplied the sergeant and he and his comrade realized quite a profitable hour of labor before withdrawing into their company's main position. (19)

During the initial phase of the attack, the commander of Company L, Captain Clifford R. Austin, had requested immediate 81mm mortar fire in the vicinity of the farm buildings. Enemy reserves were being assembled here in order to exploit any serious penetration or major break in the forward lines. The 81mm mortar section, emplaced in the quarry, was assigned the

(19) Statement of Captain Clifford R. Austin, 10 February 1944.



fire mission of dispersing the enemy forming in rear of the farm buildings. This target had been previously designated as a primary target and registration fires had been completed by this section of 81 mm mortars. Forty to fifty rounds of H.E. Light ammunition were fired at a rapid rate and thereafter sustained fire was maintained for several hours. This one section of 81 mm mortars expended 3600 rounds of ammunition. Several hundred rounds were fired "blind" - without the employment of a forward observer.

When Company L requested fire on the enemy assembly area, it was discovered that the platoon leader and two section leaders of the 81 mm mortar platoon were isolated and "cut-off" from friendly troops, along with an artillery forward observers' party of four men. The heavy weapons company commander conversed with his mortar platoon leader by telephone and learned that the trapped observers could not escape from their observation post -- a two story stucco house located in the gap between Companies I and L. The observers reported that bursts of machine gun fire prevented them from using the windows to observe and adjust artillery and mortar fire on available enemy targets. Consequently, these observers were of no assistance in firing on the reserves forming near the farm buildings. Initially, the mortars were actually obtaining excellent results without the use of observers. Captain Austin reported that the fire was perfect - exactly where he wanted it, and to maintain heavy fire on that target.

The heavy weapons company commander contacted the battalion commander at his forward O.P. and requested permission to

take a squad of riflemen from Company K and extricate the forward observers from their positions. Inasmuch as wire communications were out and could not be maintained, and the radio communication proved inadequate, the request was granted. Subsequently the F. O. parties returned to safety after spending an harrassing hour. They soon occupied other O.P.'s and contributed to the defensive battle action. *How!*

The heavy weapons company commander suggested that the battalion commander move his O. P. to another site that offered better observation and much more protection. The suggestion was ignored and the battalion commander remained in a position that the enemy was continually shelling in order to maintain better control of the situation. A short time later the battalion commander was killed instantly by tank fire and the battalion executive officer assumed command. The new battalion commander had maintained close contact with the progress of the battle and was well qualified professionally to continue the defense of the position.

It was ascertained that the British Staffordshires were fighting a losing battle against overwhelming numbers, both in men and tanks. The British company on the immediate right flank had fought <sup>e</sup>courageously against the several waves of tanks attacking them, but the unit had been reduced to one-third its original strength. The Britishers had exhausted their supply of ammunition, and their supply road had been "cut" temporarily by a group of infiltrating enemy. The Tommies requested the use of the 3rd Battalion supply road and shortly afterwards this road was subjected to an intense shell-

ing by the Germans. However, the British were supplied with ammunition from the distribution point in Company L's sector. The British had been partially equipped with some American weapons and this fact plus Company L having a reserve supply of ammunition on position was conducive to prolonging the battle insofar as the Tommies were concerned. This proved to be only a temporary measure, for the British company commander requested permission to withdraw his unit and join Company L, after having made their third bayonet attack due to a lack of ammunition. The British officer and sixty men, all that remained of that unit, were granted their request but were either captured or killed before joining Company L. (20)

As soon as it was evident that the British position was untenable, plans were made to reinforce the right flank of Company L with part of 3rd Battalion's small reserve. The British regiment had fought gallantly but could not be expected to resist indefinitely against superior odds on flat terrain. Small gaps appeared in their lines and in several hours the British were forced to withdraw about 400 yards and reorganize along the waddis. This withdrawal exposed the right shoulder of the 3rd Battalion's position.

The companies of the 3rd Battalion began shifting to establish defenses against renewed attacks which were sure to come. Two squads from Company K moved to the extreme right flank of Company L, and after several skirmishes the enemy infiltration stopped. A raiding party from Company K flanked and captured a German machine gun crew which had penetrated the lines and was

(20) Personal knowledge - Information via telephone.

pouring fire into Company L's position. The 3rd Battalion Rangers, a platoon of volunteers organized for raids and combat patrols, hurried from a reserve position to the extreme right flank of the battalion to reinforce the two squads of Company K. (21)

The collapse of the adjacent British troops on the right forced Company L to organize a perimeter defense. The right platoon of Company L and the recently added reinforcements were pulled back in order to protect the right rear of the battalion. The new position of Company L now assumed the outline of a semi-circle or crescent moon. Later as enemy tanks and approximately fifty paratroopers attacked the rear areas of the British sector, the 3rd Battalion's right flank was exposed to this new threat. To counter the situation, the battalion commander extended his line to the southeast, withdrawing Company L to keep it from being trapped. All available men in the vicinity of the battalion Command Post were employed to outpost the rear of the sector and to prevent further infiltration and penetration nearer the command post. (22)

Meanwhile, Company I had withstood the minor thrusts made at its position and had reinforced the fires of Company K in denying the enemy any penetration in the gap between the front-line companies. However, a German tank had broken through into the left rear of Company I and was shelling the 81mm mortars in position behind Company K. Each time the mortars fired, the tank retaliated and finally succeeded in driving the mortars into the rock quarry, where they aided in turning back the tank (21) (22) R-3, p. 55; Personal knowledge.

to its own lines.

When Company L had withdrawn to the southeast, its left platoon (on the west of the company position) had a terrific skirmish of thirty minutes in a successful attempt to disengage itself and cover the withdrawal of the main force of Company L. The fighting engaged in by this platoon seemed to be a hopeless measure because it had turned into a hectic and confusing hand-to-hand affair. However, the platoon, being composed mainly of seasoned troops, fought hard and determinedly and became disengaged through the efforts of one squad. This squad screened the disengagement of the platoon and then resorted to individual tactics and infiltration to rejoin their unit. Only two men of this squad failed to return, so the action was considered to be successful. (23)

All of the casualties, both the dead and the wounded, were left behind so as not to jeopardize the withdrawal to the new position of those men still able to fight. After Company L had organized in its new position, combat patrols were dispatched frequently to determine the strength and probable intentions of the increasing enemy forces to the east and south east (right rear). Other patrols were organized to outpost and screen the rear against further infiltration, especially by a small paratroop force which had been detected on the right rear. The paratroopers were contacted and soon liquidated. (24)

The position of the 3rd Battalion remained intact but offered a precarious situation which grew more alarming as each minute passed. The only supply road leading into <sup>the</sup> position was under constant fire and several jeeps "ran the gauntlet" to bring

(23) Statement of 1st Lt. Charles F. Barker, Jr., 10 Feb 44;

(24) Personal knowledge.

in ammunition and to evacuate the wounded to the battalion aid station. Due to the bulge in the British sector, the 3rd Battalion was on the west shoulder of this indenture, protruding like a large wart and ready to be "cut-off".

Division and Corps headquarters were alert to the 3rd Battalion's predicament and were endeavoring either to reinforce the battalion position or to have a sufficiently strong force counter-attack and partially restore the over-run British position. The latter solution was more desirable inasmuch as it would secure the right flank and rear of the 3rd Battalion, as well as reestablish the initial line of the previous day. Moreover, the greatest problem was in locating a unit that could be withdrawn from the line in another sector without endangering the strength of that portion of the MLR, and employ it as a counter-attacking force in the hard-pressed sector. Reserves in each sector were greatly inadequate and it would involve much risk to shift units of battalion or regimental strength from one sector to another. Directly to the rear of the 3rd Battalion, there were only several British artillery batteries (twenty-five pounders) between the defending battalion and the service troops of VI Corps in Anzio. The only available infantry reserve in the sector of the 157th Regiment was the 1st Battalion, 2500 yards to the left rear, which occupied breakthrough positions and constituted the only combat troops between the MLR and Anzio. *not consistent with preceding statement.*  
(25)

Immediate measures were required to maintain a more tenable position and to continue the defense of this sector. At 0500 hours 8 February, the heavily shelled 3rd Battalion command post  
(25) R-5; Personal knowledge.

and the two 81mm mortar sections nearby were withdrawn, suffering casualties as men came under small arms and machine gun fire in attempting to cross open ground in the early dawn. Company I made a slight withdrawal to relieve increasing pressure by the enemy to exploit his gains on the battalion's right flank. (26)

As soon as the new Battalion Command Post was established and the 81mm mortars had been emplaced in new positions, Company I launched a counter-attack at 0630 hours and regained its former position. The enemy had occupied the ground formerly held by Company L. When Company L had withdrawn to the southeast, it was necessary for Company K to retire a few hundred yards in order to further support both front-line companies and to repel the enemy if he should attack through the gap between companies I and L. The new Main Line of Resistance extended from Company I's position on Buenriposo Ridge to the east across intervening waddis and then turned southeast for several hundred yards. These waddis were natural obstacles with a depth of thirty to fifty feet and just as wide across the top of the gulch. These new positions were organized around the waddis, utilizing these freaks of nature to the maximum advantage. Being perpendicular to the enemy's advance, the waddis offered excellent defensive positions from which the enemy could be stopped, from making further gains. As the enemy's attack slowed, new lines of communication were established and by 0800 hours the battalion position was consolidated and improvements continued. A new supply line was established which required carrying parties

(26) R-3, p. 56; Personal knowledge.

to transport the supplies through a waddi that lead directly from the south, into the vicinity of the new battalion command post. Ammunition, water, and rations were replenished, and the new battalion aid station established, near the Battalion Command Post, 800 yards west of its former location.

At 0830 hours, the attack ceased and the Germans began consolidating their costly gains. Concentrated artillery and mortar fire was maintained on the former positions of the 3rd Battalion in an effort to prevent the enemy from entrenching and establishing himself too permanently. It was believed that the 3rd Battalion could attack and restore its initial positions. However, all available forces in the battalion were committed and were actively engaged, and soon it was learned that the battalion could not be assigned a reserve sufficient to launch a successful counter-attack to regain the old positions. One rifle company from another regiment was sent to support the 3rd Battalion. It was now planned to reinforce the present position, dig-in, and prepare for another phase of defensive combat. (See Map D) (27)

#### THE RELIEF OF THE 3RD BATTALION

At 1400 hours 8 February, a reconnaissance party from the 1st Battalion arrived to reconnoiter the 3rd Battalion's positions in order to relieve the latter battalion commencing at dark that night. Installations of the Battalion Command Post, and the 81mm mortars were relieved from dark, due to the fact that these positions were well defiladed and hidden from enemy observation. (28)

(27) (28) Personal knowledge.



The relief was completed by 0100 hours and the weary men of the 3rd Battalion marched to the breakthrough positions formerly held by the 1st Battalion. Even though they were tired, dirty, hungry, and some wounded, the men of the 3rd Battalion remained in good spirits, with the feeling that once again they had withstood an enemy onslaught of superior odds. (29)

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The Battle of the Moletta River Line served as a warning to the Allies, especially the 45th Infantry Division, that successful defensive tactics could and must be adopted to remain in control of the beachhead. At no time since the Salerno landings, in September 1943, had there been a necessity for a major change in tactics - that is, from offensive action to an "all-out" defense of a stalemated position. The Fifth Army troops had been the aggressor for the majority of their combat time in Italy. Many of these troops had become imbued with the enthusiasm and the confidence that is a result of successful offensive action. The fact that the Battle of the Moletta River Line was the first instance in many months that the Germans had exerted any inclination of assuming the role of the attacker, is the reason for selecting this action as being important. The men of the 157th Infantry had suddenly ceased their offensive operations and adopted defensive tactics designed to hold their priceless sector of the beachhead. Normally, there should have been a let-down of morale, confidence, and determination among the troops when they were forced to change from the attacker to the defender. However, there was no perceptible change (for the

(29) Personal knowledge.

worse) in the spirit and attitude of the men, who for the most part were seasoned veterans. If a change did occur, it was the fact that the men exerted even greater confidence and determination in preparing adequate defenses to withstand the onslaught, which was certain to come. This preliminary engagement served as a thorough test of defensive tactics for the Allies, producing results which allowed them to successfully withstand the attacks of the Germans in their main offensive.

*not well written* { After the battle, there was still a feeling of optimism among the troops and there were no doubts nor fears as to the ultimate outcome of this campaign in favor of the Allied Armies. It was fortunate that none of these men could foresee the future, inasmuch as they were to occupy these present positions, slight recessions being necessary, for two and one-half months while being subjected to relentless German counterattacks of the combined arms in great strength. The major German offensive would be conducted by six infantry divisions and two panzer divisions, plus separate battalions of Tiger and Panther tanks, attacking together on a four-mile front over ground held by three regiments in vain attempts to dislodge the Allies from their recently won beachhead.

2 { It is the opinion of the writer that, although the Germans were striving to capture the Factory and Carroceto with a pincer movement, the enemy had planned to seize or cut the East-West macadam highway. The possession of only a part of this road by the enemy would have seriously jeopardized the possibility of defending the terrain north of this highway which was so vitally important to the defense of the entire beachhead. Combat Group

Graeser was stopped by the 3rd Battalion 400-600 yards short of this East-West road. In their subsequent main offensive, the Germans never did reach this important road nor the overpass at the junction of the East-West road and the Albano-Anzio Highway. It is believed that the Germans had planned to use this lateral road as a Line of Departure for their final assault on Anzio itself. The deep waddis just north of this road defiladed and well protected from Allied guns, would have provided the enemy with numerous assembly areas for their "jump-off".

"Measured in statistics, the night's fire fight was one of the most concentrated in which the 157th Infantry ever engaged. In two and one-half hours supporting artillery batteries fired 24,000 rounds, while the 3rd Battalion expended its entire three-day supply of machine gun ammunition. In helping repulse the German assault, Company L's 60mm mortar crew fired 2000 rounds, Company K, 1900 rounds, and Company I, 1700 rounds. As previously noted, one section of 81mm mortars in Company M expended 3600 rounds alone." (30)

The casualties of the 3rd Battalion were not too severe, considering the vital importance of the terrain defended. The casualties inflicted on the battalion were mainly at the expense of Companies L and M. In materiel, the battalion lost six heavy and two light machine guns, one 81mm and one 60mm mortar. Some individual equipment had been abandoned, and the 81mm ammunition that could not be hand-carried was destroyed during the ordered withdrawal. The Germans had received heavy losses both in men and equipment, because of the tactics em-

(30) R-3, p. 56.

ployed by them. The enemy had made slight gains which did not justify their losses.

Shortly after the heavy machine guns were eliminated by accurate enemy fire, the heavy weapons company commander reported the loss of these weapons and initiated verbal requisitions to the regimental ordnance officer for the immediate replacements of these guns. Within thirty minutes the replacement weapons were delivered to the rock quarry. Upon checking the six new guns, it was discovered that only two of them were ready for immediate employment. The other guns were completely coated in thick cosmoline. It is needless to comment that the wrath of the heavy weapons company commander reached a new high. The supply personnel that had transported the weapons were ordered to prepare the guns for immediate use. These men learned a valuable lesson that night while cleaning the guns under harrassing enemy fire, and in the future there were no complaints against the company supply personnel. Several truck drivers and cooks were brought forward and pressed into service as replacements for the depleted gun crews.

Several days after this action, the commander of Company M made an investigation to determine how and why the six heavy machine guns had been destroyed so quickly. After discussing the situation with the officers and men of the unit he had relieved, the M Company Commander attributed the loss of guns to several factors. First, it had been ascertained shortly after the 3rd Battalion assumed the positions that adequate alternate and supplementary firing positions had not been selected and prepared. When the 2nd Battalion had been stopped suddenly and it

was necessary to prepare defensive positions, the crews of the heavy machine guns had neglected to adhere to all of the principles for the tactical employment of their automatic weapons. Failure to prepare alternate and supplementary firing positions with routes leading to them was responsible for a critical period in the ensuing action of the 3rd Battalion. Although these positions were being prepared by 3rd Battalion crews after the relief of the other battalions, the lack of time caught them unprepared when the enemy attacked. Secondly, it was learned that the 2nd Battalion gunners had indulged in promiscuous firing - especially at night. When asked the reason for this, the gunners simply replied that they wanted the enemy to know that they were still there and had plenty of ammunition. Yes, the enemy knew the exact location of these weapons and knocked them out in short order. Several of the guns were in the process of moving to other firing positions, but were destroyed nevertheless. Even though this proved more disastrous for the 3rd Battalion, the other battalions of the regiment never repeated this grave error. Of course, almost everyone knew better, but this experience demonstrated realistically what could happen when principles of defense were slighted.

### LESSONS

1. On comparatively flat and open terrain, with cross-compartments, adequate and well-coordinated defensive positions can be maintained if properly organized.

2. A well planned night attack (by moonlight) affords

surprise and initial success. The Germans achieved complete surprise and early successes by attacking several hours after dark in brilliant moonlight.

3. Both active and passive measures of defense must be maintained.

4. Alternate and supplementary firing positions must be located and established for riflemen and automatic weapons.

5. Large quantities of reserve supplies, especially ammunition, rations, and water, must be brought onto position to meet any emergency.

6. Extra automatic weapons, which can be employed almost immediately, should be available nearby.

7. Promiscuous firing of automatic weapons discloses positions and must not be tolerated.

8. Adequate and continuous communication is vital to the successful defense of a position.

9. Additional light machine guns should be allocated to the heavy weapons company for employment in the defense to augment the fire power of the other automatic weapons of the battalion. Current T/O's and E's provide for this.

10. Reorganization in the defense should be fairly constant, fulfilling the needs of the immediate situation as the action develops.

11. Properly registered defensive fires, especially artillery and mortar, are decisive factors in stopping the enemy in front of the position.

12. Reserves should be available in the battalion sector for employment as a counterattacking force to eject the enemy once he has penetrated the position.

13. Tanks can be used effectively in a night attack over open terrain if accompanied by infantry.

14. Alternate supply routes should be selected in the event that the main supply artery becomes endangered or under intense fire.

15. Problems and training in the conduct of the defense should be provided for in training sessions carried on by combat units undergoing a period of reorganization in rear areas.